

Santa Rosa County
Emergency Services Advisory Committee
January 28, 2004
2:00 p.m.

Minutes

Members present:

Joe Diamond
Gerry Goldstein
Lew Oliver

John E. Reble
Chris Rucker
Don Vanderryt

Staff present:

Sheryl Bracewell

Deb Grinde

Staff absent:

Dave Ling

Agenda approved as submitted for this meeting. Noted that it will be necessary to add some extra time to discuss Item A under Old Business.

Minutes for meeting held on December 17, approved as submitted. Noted that a draft of this meeting's minutes will be emailed to committee members a few days prior to the next meeting for review purposes only.

Presentation by Assistant Chief Nick Anderson Bagdad VFD
Assistant Chief Anderson made a presentation to the committee regarding the Bagdad Volunteer Fire Department. The Bagdad Fire Department, referred to as Station 13, covers approximately 26 square miles. Bagdad is mainly an historical area. They are approaching the completion of forty-one (41) years as a department. The biggest concerns to the Bagdad VFD are funding and personnel.

They have one station located near the Bagdad Elementary School. They currently have twenty-five (25) personnel including staff members. Last year they responded to approximately 350 calls not including those calls to assist neighboring communities.

Assistant Chief Anderson reviewed a listing of their current inventory of equipment and apparatus. The inventory consists of four (4) apparatus, one (1) boat, and two (2) responder vehicles. The department is currently making payments on two (2) pieces of apparatus.

Due to the fact that they are quickly outgrowing the current facility they are actively pursuing the purchase of property for the purpose of building a new main station. They were considering the Anderson Columbia property; however, the property was recently zoned recreational only. Their goal is to purchase property and build a station equipped to handle the area's needs for the next ten (10) years. They know this will be difficult as they are still making payments on the two (2) pieces of apparatus and are anxious to plan for future needs.

Membership and training are high priority issues at this time. The mandates by the State require that the training requirements be met.

J. Diamond questioned whether a station would be situated at the south end of the district, south of I-10. Assistant Chief Anderson advised that the department does own property on Saragon Lane in the south area of the district. However one-half to three-quarters of the property is labeled wetland. This presents environmental issues that would have to be dealt with by the department prior to building. Assistant Chief Anderson indicated that even with a station built at this location there was virtually no response to three (3) membership drives held in that area. The only advantage would be an ISO rating that would indicate that there is a station within five (5) miles of their residences.

J. Diamond indicated that the same problem exists within the Avalon district. You may have a building and equipment in that area but it is extremely difficult to get volunteers from that area to assist with their needs.

Assistant Chief Anderson pointed out that they have no EMTs in the department. They have only six (6) First Responders. They are attempting to schedule a First Responder class for sometime in February.

Assistant Chief Anderson was unable to explain the calls that showed "No Response" by the department. He indicated that the time of day might have had an impact on it. He also stated that they have attempted to get more personnel prepared for calls.

In response to Chief Reble's question regarding any assistance their department or the county as a whole may need to increase membership, the following suggestions were made:

Possible advertisement for personnel would help recruiting problems

Assistance from the county on a countywide basis would possibly draw more attention to the problem

Chief Reble questioned whether responses to a major membership drive would die off for lack of follow-up

Assistant Chief Anderson suggested the personnel at the Emergency Mgt. office might provide information to divert the callers in the right direction or possibly collect data from callers for the fire departments to act upon

J. Diamond suggested that meeting schedules for the individual departments be available for the callers; he also suggested that the schedules be posted on the web sites

L. Oliver questioned what efforts the Santa Rosa Fire Fighters Association might contribute toward a countywide effort.

The operating budget for Bagdad Volunteer Fire Department is \$84,000.00. The biggest portion is allotted for insurance premiums. Approximately \$32,000.00 is spent on payments for equipment annually. In addition, no special financing arrangements are available for these purchases.

J. Diamond suggested that Bagdad VFD might want to look into charging insurance companies for car fires, house fires, etc. for additional income.

Suggested that the current station remain active for the north end of the district, that a new main station be erected in the area just north of I-10 near Garcon Point Rd. and a third station be situated in the south end of the district on the Saragon Lane property.

Discussion held regarding the fact that a small portion of the district would still be out of the five-mile range if the main station were erected just north of I-10 at Garcon Point Rd. Dickerson City area is nine and one-half miles away from the current station.

The only water recreation facility in the district is a boat launch off Water Street and referred to as the Shell Pile.

Determined that the committee will travel to Bagdad VFD after the February meeting to visit the department.

*Note that Chief Reble had to leave the meeting at this time in order to respond to a fire call.

Review of Reports and Statistics

Revision to November Analysis was distributed for review. It was noted that there was a great improvement from November to December for most stations, especially the Pace department!

Noted that no fire departments receive analysis reports in order to compare their performance to others. They receive individual reports for each department; however, they do not receive comparison reports.

Review of Correspondence and Additional Information Items

None

Old Business

Fire Department MSBU and Other Funding

It is necessary to discuss funding structure for the fire departments in order to submit proposals for any changes for 2005. Per H. Walker MSBU hearings are held around the last week of August and the first week of September. At the request of the Property Appraiser the time frame for submission to the property appraiser would be no later than the end of March 2004.

It is the committee's task to review the MSBU rates that are currently in place and compare those rates to a proposal that was generated by Chief Reble, Staff members and Jan Vann, Deputy Property Appraiser, Santa Rosa County. At this time these proposals are for discussion and consideration by this committee only.

Jan Vann, Deputy Property Appraiser from the SR Property Appraiser's office has joined the meeting in order to answer any questions.

Discussion ensued regarding the issues surrounding an increase in the tax rates. Compared the current tax rates and the proposed tax rates on an item-by-item basis. Some changes include the following:

The Ag Classified (as opposed to Ag owned) exemption has been eliminated

The \$450.00 cap for any single property owner (whether residential or commercial) has been removed

Additional commercial classifications by square footage have been included in accordance with the costs recently generated by the Building/Inspection Department again based on square footage

Noted that the last change that affected the MSBU rates occurred in 1998.

J. Diamond questioned whether any impact fees could be generated if the proposal goes into effect and new building occurs within the district. The current rates are based on properties taxed in 2003. The proposed dollars only consider that property and no additional growth or planned properties. The proposal does not include any property owned by a government entity.

Committee agreed that the caps on commercial properties and the rates on the commercial properties definitely needs to be scrutinized.

Discussion continued regarding the justification of requesting an increase of this magnitude. Questions arose as to whether the rates were not sufficient, whether they were just enough or whether they were more than sufficient. Concerns were voiced regarding the conveyance of this message to the BOCC during an election year.

Reiterated the fact that the districts funded by ad valorem taxes would not be affected by this proposed rate increase. The Fire Commissioners of those districts funded by ad valorem taxes are elected and responsible for pursuing tax increases within their own districts. J. Diamond stated that the Avalon district is considering the addition of an impact fee for any new building within their district based on size.

C. Rucker questioned H. Walker regarding the validity of the entire increase as proposed. C. Rucker stated that the BOCC would request accountability regarding what the funds would be spent on prior to collecting those funds. H. Walker agreed that a substantial increase would indicate that accountability and results would have to be documented.

J. Diamond suggested that the districts funded by MSBU taxes complete a budget form that would indicate where and/or what the funds would be spent on. A standardized format along with standardized definitions should be submitted to this committee by the departments prior to this committee submitting any proposals to the BOCC.

Vice Chairperson Goldstein agreed and suggested that the committee will need to be prepared to answer any and all questions from the Commissioners regarding the need for the increase.

D. Vanderryt, T. Simmons and members of this committee are aware of the fact that the departments are in urgent need of many items up to and including new stations. The committee's task will be to make others aware of this necessity.

J. Diamond advised that as a means to educate the community the Avalon VFD will be holding an open house. They plan to display trucks, equipment and supplies, outfits, gear, etc. As a part of the exhibit they will display the cost of each item. The department's goal is to raise the public's awareness level.

The committee's next step will be to obtain a standardized budget form in order for the departments to complete in a timely manner. S. Bracewell will obtain those forms from H. Walker and distribute to the fire departments for completion. Each department should show their current budget and what they might spend the proposed increase on. This will highlight the shortages, show the needs and indicate how the proceeds will be used.

*Note that at this time Chief Reble returned to the meeting. A few moments were taken in order to update Chief Reble on what occurred during his absence.

Chief Reble raised the following concerns:

In order to have any effect on the MSBU rates for 2005 proposals must be approved by the BOCC by the end of March. Consequently the committee must determine whether it will pursue the proposal or take the next year to review information regarding the same.

Each fire department that has made a presentation to the committee has consistently requested additional funding
The inequities within the system must be addressed

- Tiered system must be reviewed for inconsistencies, e.g. a Tom Thumb paying the same rate as a Wal-Mart
- A person residing in a trailer paying the same rate as a person who owns a 5,000 square foot home on the bay
- Wal-Mart, Pea Ridge paying \$150.00 vs. Wal-Mart, Midway paying \$\$8,645.81

Chief Reble advised that the Santa Rosa County Firefighters Association has requested that each of the fire department submit a listing of increases under each expense category that they have incurred since 1998. This information was requested about 3 months ago and should be available for the February meeting.

Discussion continued regarding the short period of time allotted for this project. Determined that the Property Appraiser's office is in need of the additional time. It is agreed that the additional funds are necessary in almost all districts. It is understood that if each district received the additional funds that the funds would ultimately go toward new buildings. It is also understood that even if the proposed tax rate was approved there are departments (mainly slow growth areas) that would still be in need of county assistance.

Recognized the concerns of the committee. Those concerns are if the timing is feasible and if there will be enough information and documentation available to substantiate the proposal to the BOCC.

After further discussion a motion was made by Vice Chairperson J. Goldstein to submit this proposal to the Board of County Commissioners no later than the end of March and only with supporting documentation attached to the proposal. The motion was seconded.

Discussion on the motion: None

Public Comment:

D. Grinde, 5558 Wesley Drive, Milton, FL

Suggested that the committee pursue only the commercial inequities at this time. Take the time to collect further information and generate a graduated schedule for any further increases that is determined to be necessary. The graduated schedule could be a planned increase on an annual basis for a number of years.

Motion carried with six (6) in favor and one (1) in opposition.

Note that Mr. D. Vanderryt is not opposed to the proposal itself. He believes that the increase is not sufficient and should be greater.

At this time items B & C have been tabled.

New Business

Tabled until the next meeting.

Public Comments and Questions

None

Next meeting is Wednesday, February 25, 2004 at 2:00 PM

Field trip to Bagdad VFD will immediately follow meeting

Speaker for February will be Mike Ward, Allentown VFD